

Remarks in Poplar Bluff, Missouri
September 6, 2004

The President. Thank you all. Thanks for coming. I'm glad to be here celebrating Labor Day with you. It's good to be in a part of the world where the cowboy hats outnumber the ties. Thanks for coming. You know, you might have heard I got an interesting invitation to come here to Poplar Bluff, Missouri. I get a lot of invitations. I've never gotten one with 10,000 signatures on it. But I was somewhat surprised when we choppered over here, because it looks like there's a lot more people than 10,000 that have come today.

Thanks for coming. Thanks for having me. It's a beautiful part of the world. People are good people here. I'm proud to be here to ask for your vote. You sure know how to make a President feel welcome.

And I know you will join me in wishing President Clinton the very best wishes in the recovery from his surgery. His surgery went well, which is good news. And we just pray for a speedy recovery for the former President.

My one regret today is I wish Laura were here to see the size of this crowd. You know, she was a public school librarian when I asked her to marry me. She was working at an elementary school, and she said, "Fine, I'll marry you, so long as I never have to give a political speech." [Laughter] I said, "Okay." [Laughter] Fortunately, it's not a promise she held me to. She gave a fantastic speech. She's a great mom. She is a wonderful wife. She is a great First Lady. I'm going to give you some reasons to put me back in, but perhaps the most important one of all is so that Laura is First Lady for 4 more years.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. I'm proud to be running for a second term with my friend Dick Cheney. He doesn't have the waviest hair in the race. [Laughter] I didn't pick him for his hairdo. [Laughter] I picked him because he has good judgment, great experience, and he can get the job done.

I appreciate my friend Jo Ann Emerson, the fine Congresswoman from this district.

She's a pleasure to work with. Every time I see her, she says, "Remember Missouri." And so does your Senator, Kit Bond. I'm proud to be here with Kit. I'm asking you to put me back in there, but make sure, as you do, put him in too. He's a great United States Senator. Give him 6 more years.

And Jim Talent—Jim Talent is a fine Senator as well. As they say down in Crawford, he's making a good hand—[laughter]—smart guy, good, honest man. I appreciate being with him.

It's good to be here with your next Governor, Matt Blunt. I appreciate my friend Peter Kinder here. He's representing the State senate. It looks like his cousin came. [Laughter] House Speaker Catherine Hanaway is with us. I'm proud you're here.

I want to thank Mayor Lloyd Matthews. Mr. Mayor, thank you so very much for this very generous and kind introduction—invitation to be here. It means a lot. And I also want to thank Hardy Billington and David Hahn. These are local veterans. These boys sure know how to throw a party. I want to thank the Sho-Me marching band. Thank you all for coming. Poplar Bluff High School, I appreciate you all being here.

Most of all, I want to thank you all for coming on Labor Day. It means a lot.

Audience member. [Inaudible]

The President. Well, I'm glad to be here. But I'm not only asking for the vote; I'm asking for your help. I think it's really important in our society to vote. I believe in a free society, we have an obligation to participate in our elections.

So I'm asking you to register your friends and neighbors. Don't overlook discerning Democrats, people like Zell Miller. Zell Miller knows. There's a lot of good Democrats in this part of the world that understand that Dick Cheney and I will make this world safer, stronger, and better for every single American. And if you're a Democrat or independent, you're welcome here. We're glad you're here.

And then when you get people heading to the polls, after you register them, get them leaning our way. Get them to come our way. I want to thank you for your help. I want to thank you for what you're going to do, coming down the stretch run. There's no

doubt in my mind, with your help, we'll carry Missouri again and win the big election in November of '04.

I'm looking forward to this race. I am. I like to get out with the people. I'm looking forward to telling the people of this country where I stand, what I believe, and where I'll lead this country.

I believe every child can learn and that every school must teach. That's why we passed important reforms of our schools in Washington. See, we're challenging the soft bigotry of low expectations. I believe if you lower the bar, you're going to get lousy results. I believe if you believe in the best and worth of every child and raise that bar, you're going to get excellent results. I believe it's important to measure early, so you can solve problems early, before it's too late. We've got to stop this practice of just shuffling kids through school whether they can read and write and add and subtract or not. I believe in local control of schools. And I know we're making progress closing the achievement gap in America, and we're not turning back.

I believe we have a moral responsibility to honor our seniors with good health care. You might remember the old Medicare debate. They called it "Mediscare." [Laughter] People would talk about it; then they would beat you over the head politically with the issue. But I went to Washington to fix things. I went to Washington to solve problems. Listen, the old Medicare system, which worked well for a lot of seniors, got outdated. After all, it would pay \$100,000 for heart surgery but wouldn't pay for the medicine to prevent the heart surgery from being needed in the first place. So we strengthened and modernized Medicare. Our seniors got choices. And beginning in 2006, there's going to be prescription drug coverage for our seniors. And we are not going to turn back.

I believe in the energy and innovation of our farmers and workers and small-business owners and ranchers. And that's why we unleashed that energy with the largest tax relief in a generation. When you're out there gathering up the vote, I want you to remind your friends and neighbors what we have been through. We've been through a recession. We've been through corporate scandals. We've been through a terrorist attack, all of

which affected our economy. But we're overcoming those obstacles.

This economy, because of our tax relief and because we've got great people in this country who refuse to be intimidated, who believe in a future, is strong, and it's getting stronger. Last Friday, we showed we added 144,000 new jobs in August—1.7 million since August of '03. The national unemployment rate has fallen to 5.4 percent. That is lower than the average rate of the 1970s, the 1980s, and the 1990s.

I believe a President must confront problems and not pass them on to future generations and future Presidents. I believe the most solemn duty of the American President is to protect the American people. If America shows uncertainty or weakness in this decade, the world will drift toward tragedy. This isn't going to happen on my watch.

I'm running for President with a clear and positive plan to build a safer world and a more hopeful America. I'm running with a compassionate conservative philosophy. Government should help people improve their lives, not try to run their lives. And I believe this Nation wants steady, consistent, principled leadership, and that is why, with your help, we're going to score a great national victory in November.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Listen, the world we live in is a changing world. You know, when our dads were coming up, a person was likely to have one job at one company, and mom was going to stay at home. That's just the way it used to be. It's changed here in America. A lot of women not only work inside the home; they're working outside the home. Our workforce is changing. People are changing careers more often these days.

And yet, the most fundamental systems, the Tax Code and health coverage and pension plans and worker training, were created for the world of yesterday, not tomorrow. I'm running to transform these systems so that all citizens are equipped and prepared and thus free to be able to realize the great promise of America.

Listen, any hopeful society has got to have a growing economy. And that's why I've got a plan to keep this economy moving forward.

In a changing world, America must be the best place in the world to do business. That means we've got to stop these junk lawsuits that are hounding our small-business owners in America. It means we've got to reduce the regulations on those who employ people.

To create jobs here in America, we need an energy plan. Listen, I submitted one to the Congress over 2 years ago. It's a plan that encourages conservation. It's a plan that encourages the use of renewable sources of energy like ethanol and biodiesel. It's a plan that encourages clean coal technology. It's a plan that encourages environmentally sensitive exploration for natural gas. But it's a plan that says, "If we expect to keep jobs in America, we must be less dependent on foreign sources of energy."

We're going to keep opening up markets. Listen, this farm economy is strong. You might remember what it was like in 2000. Now, look, I understand the farm economy is never strong enough—[laughter]—and the weather is never good enough. [Laughter] The price of beans and corn are pretty high. And one reason it's high is because I made a pledge to our farmers here in Missouri and around the country that I would do my best to open up markets. We want you feeding not only the American citizens; we want you feeding everybody around the world.

To create jobs, we've got to be wise about how we spend your money in Washington and keep your taxes low. Listen, there's a difference in this campaign about taxes. I'm running against a fellow who has promised over \$2 trillion of new Federal spending. And so they said, "Well, how are you going to pay for it?" And he said, "Well, I'm going to pay for it by just taxing the rich." Let me tell you two things wrong with that: One, you can't tax the rich enough to pay for the \$2 trillion in new spending. You can play like you can tax the rich enough to do it, but the numbers don't add up. Secondly, you've heard that business, haven't you, in politics, about "tax the rich?" That's why they hire accountants and lawyers, and you get stuck with the bill. But we're not going to let him tax you, because we're going to win in November.

Another drag on our economy is the Federal Tax Code. The Tax Code today is a com-

plicated mess. It's more than a million words long and filled with loopholes for special interests. This Tax Code weighs heavily on our economy. It weighs heavily on every American family. Sitting down to do your taxes shouldn't require wading through more than 1 million words of complicated rules.

This current Tax Code burdens hard-working Americans with more than 6 billion hours of paperwork and headache every year. That's about as much time as all Missouri's workers and small-business owners and farmers and ranchers spend at work in an average year. This Tax Code needs to be changed.

The Tax Code is so complicated, even the short tax form requires more than 11 hours to prepare. That doesn't sound very short to me. For the sake of economic growth and for the sake of fairness, I will lead a bipartisan team to simplify and reform the Federal Tax Code.

We need to do more to help our workers gain the skills necessary to fill the jobs of the 21st century. That's why I'll double the number of people served by our principal job training program and expand access to our community colleges all across America.

Most new jobs are now filled by people with at least 2 hours of college—2 years of college. Yet one in four of our students gets there. In our high schools, we'll fund early intervention programs to help students at risk. We'll place a new focus on math and science. Over time, we'll require a rigorous exam before graduation. By raising performance at our high schools and expanding Pell grants for low- and middle-income families, we'll help more Americans start their career with a college diploma.

In a time of change, we've got to make sure that we've got health care that's available and affordable. More than one-half of the uninsured are small-business employees and their families. Yet small businesses are having trouble affording health care. To make sure they get the help they need, we will allow small firms to join together to purchase insurance at the discounts available to big companies.

We'll expand health savings accounts. We're going to make sure that every poor county in America has got a health center—a health community center or a rural health

center, so people can get the primary care they need, so we can help people with their health care.

But let me tell you what else we need to do. We need to do something about these frivolous lawsuits that are running up the cost of your health care and running good docs out of business. We've got an issue in America. Too many good docs are getting out of business. Too many ob-gyns aren't able to practice their love with women all across this country. See, I don't think you can be pro-doctor and pro-patient and pro-hospital and pro-trial-lawyer at the same time. I think you've got to make a choice. My opponent made his choice, and he put him on the ticket. I made my choice. I'm for medical liability reform—now. In all we do to improve health care, we will make sure that health decisions are made by doctors and patients, not by bureaucrats in Washington, DC.

We'll continue to promote ownership in America. In a changing time, ownership can bring stability to your life. There's nothing better than hearing the fact that more and more people are owning their own home. The homeownership rate in America is at an alltime high. We'll continue to expand homeownership across this country. There's nothing better than somebody opening up their door saying, "Welcome to my home. Welcome to my piece of property."

As well our retirement systems must reflect the changing times. If you're an older citizen, or a near-older citizen like me, a baby boomer, nothing is going to change with your Social Security. It's a solemn pledge this Government has made. It's a pledge that will be kept. But we better worry about our children and grandchildren when it comes to Social Security. I believe younger workers ought to be allowed to put some of their taxes aside in a personal savings account to enhance their Social Security benefit.

There's a difference of philosophy in this campaign. If you listen carefully to the rhetoric of my opponent, he's going to expand Government. Ours is a campaign that is going to expand opportunity. I believe Government ought to trust the people of the United States of America.

In a changing world, there are some things that won't change, the values we try to live

by, courage, compassion, reverence, and integrity. In a changing world, we will stand by the institutions that give us stability, our families, our schools, and our religious congregations.

We stand for a culture of life in which every person matters and every person counts. We stand for marriage and family, which are the foundations of society. We stand for religious charities and community-based organizations that provide a safety net of mercy and compassion. Our Government must never discriminate against faith-based programs. And I stand for the appointment of Federal judges who know the difference between personal opinion and the strict interpretation of the law.

This election will also determine how America responds to the continuing danger of terrorism. Since the terrible morning of September the 11th, 2001, we have fought the terrorists across the Earth, not for pride, not for power, but because the lives of our citizens are at stake. Our strategy is clear. We'll defend our homeland. We'll transform our military. We'll reform and strengthen our intelligence services. We will stay on the offensive. We will strike the terrorists abroad so we do not have to face them here at home. We will advance liberty in the broader Middle East and around the world by staying true to our beliefs and being resolved and firm. We will prevail.

Our strategy is succeeding. I want you to listen to this. Four years ago, Afghanistan was the home base of Al Qaida; Pakistan was a transit point for terrorist groups; Saudi Arabia was fertile ground for terrorist fundraising; Libya was secretly pursuing nuclear weapons; Iraq was a gathering threat; and Al Qaida was largely unchallenged as it planned its attacks. Because we acted, the Government of Afghanistan is fighting terror; Pakistan is capturing terrorist leaders; Saudi is making raids and arrests; Libya is dismantling its weapons programs; the army of a free Iraq is fighting for freedom; and more than three-quarters of Al Qaida's key members and associates have been brought to justice. We have led. Many have joined, and America and the world are safer.

Progress involved careful diplomacy and clear moral purpose and some tough decisions, and the toughest came on Iraq. We knew Saddam Hussein's record of aggression and support for terror. Remember, he housed Abu Nidal and his crowd. He's the guy that killed Leon Klinghoffer. Zargawi and his bunch—he's the guy that beheads people—he paid the families of suiciders. He subsidized them. We knew his long history of pursuing and even using weapons of mass destruction. We know that after September the 11th, our country must think differently. It's a lesson we must not forget. We must take threats seriously before they fully materialize.

In Saddam Hussein, we saw a threat. So I went to the United States Congress. They looked at the intelligence I looked at. They remembered the history I remembered. And they voted overwhelmingly to use—to authorize the use of force. My opponent looked at the same intelligence I looked at. He voted for the authorization of force.

Before the Commander in Chief commits troops into combat, we must try all means to solve a problem. That's why I went to the United Nations. I was hoping that diplomacy would work. The United Nations looked at the same intelligence I looked at. They remembered the same history of Saddam Hussein that we remembered. And they voted 15 to nothing, and the U.N. Security Council said to Saddam Hussein, "Disclose, disarm, or face serious consequences." The world spoke again.

But as he had for over a decade, Saddam Hussein refused the demands of the free world. He wasn't interested. As a matter of fact, when they sent inspectors into his country, he systematically deceived them. So I had a choice to make at this point in our history: Do I trust the word of a madman—

Audience members. No-o-o!

The President. —do I forget the lessons of September the 11th, or take action to defend this country? Given that choice, I will defend America every time.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Because we acted in our own self-interest, because we acted to defend

ourselves, 50 million people now live in freedom. In Afghanistan, a country which has been brutalized by the Taliban, a country in which many young girls didn't get to go to school, a country in which their moms were whipped in the public squares because they didn't toe the line to these barbarians running the country, has now registered 10 million people to vote in the upcoming election. Freedom is powerful. Freedom is powerful. Despite ongoing acts of violence, Iraq now has a very strong Prime Minister, a National Council, and national elections will be held in Iraq in January.

We're going to stand with the people in those countries because when America gives its word, America must keep its word. And we're serving a vital cause. See, free societies in the Middle East will be hopeful societies which no longer feed resentment and breed violence for export. Free governments in the Middle East will fight terrorists instead of harboring them. And that keeps us safer, and it makes the world more peaceful.

Our mission in Afghanistan and Iraq is clear. We will help new leaders to train their armies so Afghan citizens and Iraqi citizens can defend their country against the few who want to thwart the hopes of the many. We'll help them move toward elections. We'll get them to the path of stability and democracy as quickly as possible, and then our troops will return home with the honor they have earned.

I've had the privilege of meeting many who serve. I've seen their unselfish courage and their great decency. Ladies and gentlemen, the cause of freedom is in really good hands. And I want to thank the veterans who are here for having set such a great example to those who wear the uniform.

I've made a commitment to our troops and to their loved ones. They will have all the resources, all the tools and support they need for them to do their missions. That's why a year ago, September, I went to Congress and proposed \$87 billion in funding for body armor and spare parts, ammunition, fuel, other supplies needed for our troops in combat in Afghanistan and in Iraq. And that really important funding request received bipartisan support. It was so overwhelming that only 12 United States Senators voted against

the funding request, 2 of whom are my opponent and his runningmate.

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. Only four United States Senators voted to authorize the use of force, and then voted against funding our troops—only four—and two of those Senators were my opponent and his runningmate. When asked to explain his decision, he said, “I actually did vote for the \$87 billion, before I voted against it.”

Audience members. Boo-o-o!

The President. I suspect here in Poplar Bluff, not many people talk that way. They then pressed him, and he said he’s proud of his vote. And finally, he said, “It was a complicated matter.” There’s nothing complicated about supporting our troops in combat.

After voting for the war but against funding it, after saying he would have voted for the war even knowing everything we know today, my opponent woke up this morning with new campaign advisers and yet another new position. [Laughter] Suddenly, he’s against it again. [Laughter]

Audience members. Flip-flop! Flip-flop! Flip-flop!

The President. No matter how many times Senator Kerry changes his mind, it was right for America then, and it’s right for America now that Saddam Hussein is no longer in power.

Over the next 4 years, I’ll continue to work with our allies and friends to promote freedom and peace. There’s about 40 nations involved in Afghanistan, some 30 in Iraq. And I appreciate their service and sacrifice, and so do our troops. Over the 4 years, we’ll build these alliances and make them stronger, but I will never turn over America’s national security decisions to leaders of other countries.

I believe in the transformational power of liberty. The wisest use of American strength is to advance freedom. I believe America is called to lead the cause of freedom. I believe that millions in the Middle East plead in silence for their liberty. I believe that given the chance, they will embrace the most honorable form of government every devised by man. I believe all these things because I understand freedom is not America’s gift to the

world; freedom is the Almighty God’s gift to each man and woman in this world.

This young century will be liberty’s century. By promoting freedom at home and abroad, we’ll build a safer world and a more hopeful America. We’ll reform our systems to help our people, to help people realize their dreams. We’ll spread ownership and opportunity to every corner of this country. We’ll pass the enduring values of our country on to another generation. We will continue to lead the cause of freedom and peace, the peace we all want.

For all Americans, these years in our history will always stand apart. You know, there are quiet times in the life of a nation when little is expected of its leaders. This isn’t one of those times. This is a time that needs—when we need firm resolve and clear vision and a deep faith in the values that make us a great nation.

None of us will ever forget that week when one era ended and another began. I stood in the ruins of the Twin Towers on September the 14th, 2001. It’s a day I will never forget. There were workers in hardhats there, yelling at me at the top of their lungs, “Whatever it takes.” I remember trying to do my best to comfort people, and a guy looked me right in the eye, and he said, “Do not let me down.” He took that day personally. Everybody there took it personally. You took it personally, and so did I. I have a duty that goes on. I wake up every morning thinking about how to better protect our country. I will never relent in defending America, whatever it takes.

Four years ago, I traveled your great State asking for the vote. I said if you gave me a chance to serve, I would uphold the honor and the dignity of the office to which I had been elected. And with your help, with your hard work, I will do so for the next 4 years.

God bless. Thank you for coming. Thank you all. Thanks so much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:08 p.m. at Ray Clinton Park. In his remarks, he referred to Missouri Secretary of State Matt Blunt, candidate for Missouri Governor; Missouri State Senator Peter Kinder, candidate for Missouri Lieutenant Governor; Catherine L. Hanaway, speaker, Missouri House of Representatives; Mayor Lloyd Matthews

of Poplar Bluff, MO; Senator Zell Miller of Georgia, who made the keynote address at the Republican National Convention; senior Al Qaida associate Abu Musab Al Zarqawi; and Prime Minister Ayad Allawi of the Iraqi Interim Government.

Memorandum on the 2004 Combined Federal Campaign

September 6, 2004

*Memorandum for the Heads of Executive
Departments and Agencies*

Subject: 2004 Combined Federal Campaign

I am delighted that the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, Michael O. Leavitt, has agreed to serve as the Chair of the 2004 Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) of the National Capital Area. I ask you to enthusiastically support the CFC by personally chairing the campaign in your Agency and appointing a top official as your Vice Chair.

The Combined Federal Campaign is an important way for Federal employees to support thousands of worthy charities. Public servants not only contribute to the campaign but also assume leadership roles to ensure its success.

Your personal support and enthusiasm will help positively influence thousands of employees and will guarantee another successful campaign.

George W. Bush

NOTE: This memorandum was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 7. An original was not available for verification of the content of this memorandum.

Remarks in Lee's Summit, Missouri

September 7, 2004

The President. Thanks for coming.

Audience members. Four more years! Four more years! Four more years!

The President. Thank you all very much for coming this morning. We're starting a bus trip here in your important State, and a great place to start right here in Lee's Summit. I appreciate you coming out.

And I want to thank the good folks here at Lee's Summit High for opening up this

beautiful facility. I want to thank Tony Stansberry, who is the superintendent, and John Faulkenberry, who is the principal. I want to thank all the teachers who are here for teaching. I want to thank the students who are here. Listen, study more than you watch TV.

Thanks for coming out to say hello. I'm here to ask for your vote. I think you've got to get out amongst the people and give them a reason why, and that's what I'm here to do today and to ask for that vote. We carried Missouri last time, and with your help, we'll carry it this time.

I'm sorry Laura is not with me today.

Audience members. Aw-w-w!

The President. Yes, I know. [Laughter] When I asked her to marry me, she said, "Fine, I will, so long as I don't ever have to give a political speech." [Laughter] I said, "Okay." [Laughter] Fortunately, she didn't hold me to the promise. She did a magnificent job last week in New York City. I'm not surprised. She's a great person, a wonderful wife, great mom. I'm going to give you some reasons to put me back in, but perhaps the most important one of all is so that Laura has 4 more years as the First Lady.

I appreciate my runningmate, Dick Cheney. He's a fine guy. I admit he doesn't have the prettiest hairdo in the race. [Laughter] I didn't pick him for his hair. [Laughter] I picked him because he can get the job done.

I want to thank my friend Kit Bond, the United States Senator from the State of Missouri, for his leadership. Put him back in there for 6 more years. Reelect this good man. And he's working with a good fellow in Jim Talent, the other United States Senator from Missouri. I really appreciate working with him. I also appreciate working with Congressman Sam Graves, who is with us today.

I wish Jeanne Patterson all the best in her run for the United States Congress. Chris Byrd is here. Madame Mayor is with us today, Mayor Karen Messerli. I appreciate her coming. Madame Mayor, I'm honored you're here. Thanks for taking time to be here today. Appreciate your support. Fill the potholes. [Laughter] I want to thank Mark Wills for being here, the country and western singer.